



# Fear

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*Drawings by* WILFRED JONES



I WAS staying a night with him on the road. The mission stood on a little hill just outside the gates of a populous city. The first thing I noticed about him was the difference of his taste. The missionary's house as a rule is furnished in a style which is almost an outrage to decency. The parlor, with its air of an unused room, is papered with a gaudy paper; and on the wall hang texts, engravings of sentimental pictures, "The Soul's Awakening" and Luke Filde's "The Doctor"; or, if the missionary has been long in the country, congratulatory scrolls on stiff red paper. There is a Brussels carpet on the floor, rocking-chairs if the household is American, and a stiff arm-chair on each side of the fireplace if it is English. There is a sofa which is so placed that nobody sits on it, and by the grim look of it few can want to. There are lace curtains at the windows. Here and there are occasional tables on which are photographs, and what-nots with modern porcelain on them. The dining-room has an appearance of more use, but almost the whole of it is taken up by a large table, and when you sit at it you are crowded into the fireplace. But in Mr. Wingrove's study there were books from floor to ceiling, a table littered with papers, curtains of a rich green stuff, and over the fireplace a Tibetan banner. There was a row of Tibetan Buddhas on the chimney-piece.

"I don't know how it is, but you've

got just the feeling of college rooms about the place," I said as I looked about the study.

"Do you think so?" he answered soberly. "I was a tutor at Oriel for some time."

He was a man of nearly fifty, I should think, tall and well covered, though not stout, with gray hair, cut very short, and a reddish face. One imagined that he must be a jovial man, fond of laughter, an easy talker and a good fellow; but his eyes disconcerted you. They were grave and unsmiling; they had a look that I could only describe as harassed. I wondered if I had fallen upon him at an inconvenient moment when his mind was taken up with irksome matters; yet somehow I felt that this was not a passing expression, but a settled one rather, and I could not understand it. He had just that look of anxiety which you see in certain forms of heart disease. He chatted about one thing and another, then he said:

"I hear my wife come in. Shall we go into the drawing-room?"

He led me in, and introduced me to a thin little woman, with gold-rimmed spectacles and a shy manner. It was plain that she belonged to a different class from her husband. Mr. Wingrove was a gentleman, though it was evident that his wife was not a lady. She had a common intonation. The drawing-room was furnished in a way I had

never before seen in a missionary's house. There was a Chinese carpet on the floor. Chinese pictures, old ones, hung on the yellow walls. Two or three Ming tiles gave a dash of color. In the middle of the room was a black-wood table, elaborately carved, and on it was a figure in white porcelain. I made a trivial remark.

"I don't much care for all these Chinese things meself," answered my hostess, briskly, "but Mr. Wingrove's set on them. I'd clear them all out if I had my way."

I laughed, though not because I was amused; and then I caught in Mr. Wingrove's eyes a flash of icy hatred, so that I was astonished. But it passed in a moment.

"We won't have them if you don't like them, my dear," he said gently. "They can be put away."

"Oh, I don't mind them if they please you."

We began to talk about my journey, and in the course of conversation I happened to ask Mr. Wingrove how long it was since he had been in England.

"Seventeen years," he said.

I was surprised.

"But I thought you had one year's furlough every seven?"

"Yes, but I have n't cared to go."

"Mr. Wingrove thinks it's bad for the work to go away for a year like that," explained his wife. "Of course I don't care to go without him."

I wondered how it was that he had ever come to China. The actual details of the call fascinate me, and often enough you find people who are willing to talk of it, though you have to form your own opinion on the matter less from the words they say than from the implications of them; but I

did not feel that Mr. Wingrove was a man who would be induced either directly or indirectly to speak of that intimate experience. He evidently took his work very seriously.

"Are there other foreigners here?" I asked.

"No."

"It must be very lonely," I said.

"I think I prefer it so," he answered, looking at one of the pictures on the wall. "They'd only be business people, and you know"—he smiled—"they have n't much use for missionaries. And they're not so intellectual that it is a great hardship to be deprived of their company."

"And of course we're not really alone, you know," said Mrs. Wingrove. "We have two evangelists, and then there are two young ladies who teach. And there are the school-children."

Tea was brought in, and we gossiped desultorily. Mr. Wingrove seemed to speak with effort, and I had increasingly that feeling in him of perturbed repression. He had pleasing manners and was certainly trying to be cordial, and yet I had a sense of effort. I led the conversation to Oxford, mentioning various friends whom he might know.

"It's so long since I left home," he said, "and I have n't kept up with any one. There's a great deal of work in a mission like this and it absorbs one."

I thought he was exaggerating a little, so I remarked:

"Well, by the number of books you have I take it that you get a certain amount of time for reading."

"I very seldom read," he answered with abruptness, in a voice that I knew already was not quite his own.

I was a little surprised, and now I began to be more puzzled. There was

something odd about the man. At last, as was inevitable, I suppose, he began to talk about the Chinese. Mrs. Wingrove said the same things about them that I had already heard so many missionaries say. They were a lying people, untrustworthy, cruel, and dirty; but a faint light was visible in the east. Though the results of missionary endeavor were not very noteworthy as yet, the future was promising. They no longer believed in their old gods, and the power of the literati was broken. It is an attitude of mistrust and dislike tempered by optimism. But Mr. Wingrove mitigated his wife's strictures. He dwelt on the good nature of the Chinese, on their devotion to their parents and their love for their children.

"Mr. Wingrove won't hear a word against the Chinese," said his wife; "he simply loves them."

"I think they have great qualities," he said. "You can't walk through those crowded streets of theirs without having that impressed on you."

"I don't believe Mr. Wingrove notices the smells." His wife laughed.

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and a young woman came in. She had the long skirts and the unbound feet of the native Christian, and on her face a look that was at once cringing and sullen. She said something to Mrs. Wingrove. I happened to catch sight of Mr. Wingrove's face. When he saw her there passed over it an expression of the most intense physical repulsion. It was distorted as though by an odor that nauseated him, and then immediately the look vanished, and his lips twitched to a pleasant smile; but the effort was too great, and he showed only a tortured grimace. I looked at him with amaze-

ment. Mrs. Wingrove, with an "Excuse me," got up and left the room.

"That is one of our teachers," said Mr. Wingrove in that same set voice which had puzzled me before. "She's invaluable. I put infinite reliance on her. She has a very fine character."

Then, I hardly know why, in a flash I saw the truth; I saw the disgust in his soul for all that his will loved. I was filled with the excitement which an explorer may feel when, after an arduous journey, he comes upon a country with features new and unexpected. Those tortured eyes explained themselves, the unnatural voice, the measured restraint with which he praised, that air he had of a hunted man. Notwithstanding all he said, he hated the Chinese with a hatred beside which his wife's distaste was insignificant. When he walked through the teeming streets of the city, it was an agony to him; his missionary life revolted him; his soul was like the raw shoulders of the coolies, and the carrying-pole burned the bleeding wound. He would not go home because he could not bear to see again what he cared for so much; he would not read his books because they reminded him of the life he loved so passionately; and perhaps he had married that vulgar wife in order to cut himself off more resolutely from a world that his every instinct craved. He martyred his tortured soul with a passionate exasperation.

I tried to see how the call had come. I think that for years he had been completely happy in his easy ways at Oxford, and he had loved his work, with its pleasant companionship, his books, his holidays in France and Italy. He was a contented man and asked nothing better than to spend the rest

of his days in just such a fashion; but I know not what obscure feeling had gradually taken hold of him that his life was too lazy, too contented. I think he was always a religious man, and perhaps some early belief, instilled into him in childhood and long forgotten, of a jealous God who hated his creatures to be happy on earth, rankled in the depths of his heart; I think, because he was so well satisfied with his life, he began to think it was sinful. A restless anxiety seized him. Whatever he thought with his intelligence, his instincts began to tremble with the dread of eternal punishment. I do not know what put the idea of China into his head, but at first he must have thrust it aside with violent repulsion; and perhaps the very violence of his repulsion impressed the idea on him, for he found it haunting him. I think he said that he would not go, but I think he felt that he would have to. God was pursuing him, and wherever he hid himself, God followed. With his reason he struggled, but with his heart he was caught. He could not help himself. At last he gave in.

I knew I should never see him again, and I had not the time to wait before a reasonable familiarity would permit me to talk of more intimate matters.

"Tell me," I said, "do you believe God will condemn the Chinese to eternal punishment if they don't accept Christianity?"

I am sure my question was crude and tactless, for the old man in him tightened his lips. But he answered.

"The whole teaching of the gospel forces one to that conclusion. There is not a single argument that people have adduced to the contrary which has the force of the plain words of Jesus Christ."

